

# Repeat Prescription for Spiritual Health amid Trials & Suffering: i. Keep Looking Forward with Patience

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. Willie's continuing his series through the letter of James. So do grab a Bible.

We have plenty scattered around the place. If you don't have one with you, do grab a Vista Bible. And James chapter 5. If you do have a Vista Bible, you'll find that on page 1013.

So James 5. And Willie will be preaching on verses 7 to 12. But I'm going to begin the reading at verse 1. So James 5 and verse 1. Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded and their corrosion will be evidenced against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you.

[ 1 : 23 ] And the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.

You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you. Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also be patient.

Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged.

Behold, the judge is standing at the door. As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

[ 2 : 29 ] Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your yes be yes and your no be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

Well, amen, and may God bless His word to us this morning. Well, good morning.

Do you turn with me, if you would, to James chapter 5. And as Paul said, we're looking particularly at verses 7 to 12, which is all about keeping looking forward with patience.

After the diatribe we looked at last week in verses 1 to 6, the diatribe against the predatory covetousness, the pernicious cruelty of those who are given to a life of the pursuit of material gain, at the expense of the poor, and especially at the expense of oppressed believers, James now returns, you'll see, in verse 7, to addressing the church directly to brothers.

- [ 3 : 59 ] And I guess we might expect Him to exhort them to express their righteous anger in all of the above with retaliation, with a call to violent uprising, perhaps, even a call to arms.
- It would read quite naturally, wouldn't it, to say, Therefore, brothers, rise up against the oppressor. But He doesn't, does He? He doesn't issue.
- And nor does He expect them just to sink and give way to despair, as many who are just unable to resist that kind of oppression might well feel ready to do.
- No, what He does say is, Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. Like the psalmist in Psalm 37.
- We sang a version of that at the beginning. If you read that psalm, you'll see he was facing the galling prosperity of the wicked, the persecution of the poor and the needy among the people of God.
- [ 5 : 09 ] And the call is, likewise, to fret not, for that tends only to evil. But rather, He says, to trust the Lord and do good. Be still before the Lord.
- Wait for Him. For the Lord loves justice. He will not forsake His saints. Wait for the Lord, says the psalmist. Keep His way. And He will exalt you to inherit the land.
- And you will look on when the wicked are cut off. For there is a future for the man of peace. But the fate of the wicked shall be cut off.
- Well, Amen, says James here. You also. Be patient. Remain steadfast. For the coming of the Lord is at hand.
- You'll see four times in these verses he uses the word patience. Mechrothumia. It means a long-suffering, loving attitude of restraint towards those others who are mistreating it.
- [ 6 : 12 ] And when it's very hard to do so. Twice, you'll see in verse 11, again the word steadfastness comes. The determined, strong, immovable perseverance under suffering that James was urging so strongly.
- Do you remember back in chapter 1 as he opened the letter? And he urges us to that patience because, remember, it's not automatic. We have to let steadfastness have its full effect so that our faith will be made complete and perfect, not lacking in anything.
- So here we are at the end of the letter, and James is coming right back to the start to issue, if you like, a repeat prescription, which is vital for the ongoing true spiritual health that we need amid times of trial and suffering, which according to the New Testament everywhere is what we are to expect as the normal Christian life until the Lord Jesus returns.
- It's not always the case that we'll be set by trial and suffering, but if you read church history and if you look around the world today, you will find that throughout history and in most places today, most Christians everywhere face many kinds of suffering.
- So we in our Western nations in recent times who are the anomaly, and so we should expect a reversion to the norm, and indeed that may come much sooner than we would wish.
- [ 7 : 45 ] So we need to know, don't we, how then we are to live in such times. So James repeats the prescription, goes right back to the start, and he's telling us, you need to keep on taking this remedy for life.
- It's not just an acute treatment. Look back in chapter 1, verses 1 to 4. He called Christians there to keep looking forward to glory, to the perfecting of your faith.
- And it's a cause for joy, he says, because it will lead, chapter 1, verse 12, to the crown of life, which God promises to all who love Him. Well, just so here in verses 7 to 12.

He's pointing our eyes forward again, isn't he, to the coming of the Lord and the precious fruit that that will bring. Chapter 1, verses 5 to 7, he called people to keep on looking up to God and to God's grace, because God gives generously to all who ask Him in trusting faith, in wholehearted faith.

Well, here again, at the end of the letter, in chapter 5, verses 13 to 18, he's saying, in every circumstance, keep looking to God in prayer. And of course, in chapter 1, he says all of this is so necessary, because trials can so easily turn into temptations, making us deceive ourselves, so that we start to drift from the truth.

[ 9 : 08 ] Not doing the truth, but deluding ourselves into thinking that just a mere veneer of a profession of faith is sufficient.

But no, says James, in fact, that is worthless. And the very last two letters, the last two verses of chapter 5, the very end of the letter, again, they give that emphatic warning, don't they, of the grave danger of self-destruction, wandering away from the truth.

The word wandering there is the same word that he uses, translated deceived, in chapter 1, verse 16. And it's to counter this deadly danger that James writes, his prescription, and now his repeat prescription, for the divine wisdom, which alone can cure and can go on preventing that disaster, and instead will give real and robust spiritual health through every possible trial, every possible suffering that life can bring us.

So here at the end of the letter, he's saying, keep looking forward with patience. That's verses 7 to 12 here. He's saying, suffering is real, but God is faithful, abundantly compassionate, and merciful.

And keep looking up to God in prayer, he says, in verses 13 to 18. Yes, sin is real, but God is forgiving, and he will restore to fruitfulness the penitent.

[ 10 : 38 ] And finally, he says, keep looking out to your brothers and sisters, verses 19 and 20. People do wonder, but there is a way back. And that, of course, is the whole purpose of the letter.

Well, we'll finish the letter over a couple of weeks when I get back from India, but this morning, I want to look at this first part of James' repeat prescription here in verses 7 to 12, where again, he's telling us to keep looking forward with patience.

Suffering is real, he says. I'm not pretending this away. He's totally honest. But he reminds us about the Lord, our God and Savior, who is faithful, and that He is coming, and that He is the rewarder of His people.

And, of course, that He is the judge of all people. So if you look at the passage, verses 7 to 9, you'll see it consists of two commands.

To be patient in suffering and to be pure in speech. Of course, that's a very big issue all through James, isn't it? And then he gives two examples of what it means to be patient in suffering and pure in speech in verses 10 and 11 before rounding off a final exhortation in verse 12 about speech being the real barometer of true and false faith.

[ 11 : 56 ] So look with me first at verses 7 to 8. James' command here is very clear. Be patient in your suffering, he says. Don't let your heart fail you.

Don't forget that the coming of the Lord is at hand. And you will see the reward that He's promised for His loved ones. And you can also trust God who is the only lawgiver and judge, remember, that He will judge and punish evil.

So the command, be patient, begins and ends this section, do you see, like brackets. Each time with a motivating reason. Be patient.

Why? Because the coming of the Lord is certain. And in the middle he has this illustrating picture of the farmer waiting for the promised harvest. Now the therefore in verse 7 connects clearly this paragraph with what James has just said in verses 1 to 6 about the outcry of evil which God sees, he says, and God hears.

And God's hosts, His heavenly armies, are powerfully present to avenge this. And the implication, you see, is because they know that, because they know the Lord has promised a return, and indeed, as verse 9 says, because He's at the door, remember chapter 4, verse 12, He is the only true judge and lawgiver.

[ 13 : 21 ] Well, because they know that, then they don't need to seek vengeance. Because God surely will. And instead, he says, believers are to wait patiently for the precious fruit, for the wonderful reward that God's return will surely bring to them.

Now don't misunderstand, He's not saying, of course, that Christians should just ignore all evil in the world. He's not saying we should never engage in it, to oppose it, to bring succor to the oppressed. He's not saying that.

He himself has just boldly decried it, hasn't He? He's exposed it. He's condemned it, as did the prophets of old, that He talks about in verse 10, and were hated for it. But what He's doing here, He's speaking to people who clearly have very little voice, who have very meager power.

verse 6 implies that there's very little that they can do to resist the evil. And in those circumstances, what He's saying is, the power of such powerless ones is in their patience, in their long-suffering self-restraint that looks to God with trusting faith, that isn't impatient, isn't angry with God for His apparent failure to act in the way that, well, we think He should, and in the time we want Him to.

Christians aren't always powerless, of course. Indeed, some are in very strong positions of power. Some Christians are involved in government and the running of the country and so on. And if that's the case, then God's command is very clear, isn't it?

[ 15 : 00 ] They're to promote good. They're to pursue good. They're to reward good. And they're to prevent and punish evil. So this is not a cop-out.

This is not a cop-out telling us we don't have to do what we know we can do. James has just said that in verse 17. If you know what is right and you don't do it, that's sin. And that may mean, at times, taking very brave and very costly action to stem evil, to oppose wickedness in tangible ways.

And we all have to ask what power we do have to do such things. And that might include in some cases things like civil disobedience even. It might even include in some places taking up arms against others.

I mean, that's what war is, isn't it? And that's what civil war is. And if you read our history, you know that the freedoms that we enjoy today only came through such wars and civil wars.

So he's not saying that those things can never happen or are never right. But, the Bible tells us we have to be very, very careful indeed in our thinking about all of those kinds of things.

[ 16 : 12 ] But that is not what James is dealing with here. What he's doing here is he's talking, isn't he, to very hard-pressed and mostly very poor believers who are in absolutely no position to do anything about their own particular plight.

And in these circumstances, what he is saying is that the comfort, the ultimate comfort, lies in one thing and in one thing alone. And that is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The parousia. That's the word coming used there. And in the New Testament, that word always really refers to the return of the Lord Jesus to deliver his saints and to judge the wicked.

And so it always implies a very expectant, eager waiting. waiting. It's the kind of waiting where you say, I can't wait.

I can't wait for my children to come home at Christmas. I can't wait for my sister coming to visit me from Australia. Can't wait for the Six Nations Rugby to start in a couple of weeks' time.

- [ 17 : 15 ] It's that kind of active patience that James is calling for here, a longing for, the realization of what you know is a certain hope, something that is coming. It's the opposite to sort of waiting endlessly in a long line at the post office to post your parcel.

Or the waiting endlessly once you've called an ambulance and you know that these days you might well die before the ambulance ever comes. It's not that kind of waiting, it's an expectant, hopeful waiting for you know what is coming.

And it's waiting not just for the event itself, but for everything that that will mean and that will bring. And that's why we have the picture of the farmer waiting in eager anticipation for the promised fruit of his trees and his vines.

It's not instant. He says he needs the early rains to help the planting, to help the germination and so on, and the late rains to swell the grain, to swell the grapes and the fruit.

But it will come. Well, so for the Christian, it takes patience till the growth of complete and mature faith will lead to and will fit us for that crown of life that chapter 1, verse 12 speaks of.

- [ 18 : 29 ] But you see, the rains of the Christian life that nourish our growth, they often come out of the clouds, the dark clouds of trials of many kinds, don't they?

But the fruit they yield is very precious indeed. And it's much, much more valuable than these present earthly riches that we might so easily envy.

The crown of life, as Peter tells us in the very next letter of the New Testament, is unfading. It's the opposite of the wealth that James speaks of here in verses 1 to 3. It really is something that is worth waiting for.

And what that waiting means, James says inwardly, in verse 8, is establishing your heart. Now again, that's active, isn't it? It's not passive. Paul prays the same things often.

The Thessalonians, the 1 Thessalonians, he prays that God would establish your hearts blameless in holiness for the coming of the Lord Jesus as they love one another.

- [ 19 : 34 ] That's how that happens. He says it again in 2 Thessalonians, asking that God's grace will comfort their hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Notice, words and works, very James-like. It's good for the heart, says Hebrews 13, to be strengthened by grace, not by foods.

That is, by the true grace in Christ that is firmly adhering to the true faith amid many, many, many trials. Watch your heart. It's a common cry, isn't it, of the apostles of the New Testament.

Watch your heart for the Lord is coming. The Lord's coming is at hand, verse 8. Now that doesn't mean, again, that every apostle believed that that coming of Jesus must be very soon.

Jesus himself clearly implied that there may be delay, indeed very long delay. That's why he spoke those parables in chapter 24 and 25 of Matthew's Gospel about being ready all the time.

- [ 20 : 35 ] Because what Jesus is saying is we know that his coming must always be imminent. It could happen at any time. And that's why the parables emphasize, don't they, being ready all the time, not falling fast asleep, far less being found abusing God's household when he returns.

No, be ready all the time so that you are found a good and faithful servant at the master's return. So Jesus' whole emphasis is about not trying to predict the time of his return.

That's impossible, he says. Not trying to read signs in the world about when Jesus may come, that's just foolish. No, be ready every single moment because the coming is always at hand.

And of course, that's true for every one of us, isn't it? None of us know when our soul will be required of us. Don't be like the rich fool in Luke chapter 12. At any moment, the Lord could say, today, your soul is required of you.

And that's what James is enjoining, you see, not passivity, but true patience, personal forbearance, a long-suffering attitude to trials, to tribulation in life, but actively, always preparing our hearts for the great coming of the Lord, for the day of his return.

[ 21 : 51 ] True patience like that, you see, is the only antidote that there is to bitterness, to cynicism in life, to have our eye on the reward, to be detached from this world's rewards because we're always looking forward to glory with patient faith, with steady faith.

But as always in James, as we've seen, that true faith is seen and heard in word and in deed, and especially in speech. So if patience means inwardly establishing our hearts, watching our hearts, so he says also outwardly, it means watching our words.

And that brings us to a second command, verse 9, be pure in your speaking. Don't let your tongue fail you. Don't forget that the coming Lord is the only lawgiver and judge who judges all, including all of us.

So don't grumble against one another, brothers. So that you may not be judged. Behold, the judge is standing at the door. So James is reminding those of us within the church, lest we should think that somehow we get a free pass.

No, no, no. Remember what Peter says. Where does judgment begin? At the household of God. So don't let the household of God be full of that kind of verbal strife, he's saying.

[ 23 : 22 ] That's very striking just how often the apostles have to make that point in the New Testament. Walk in a manner worthy of your calling, Paul urges the Ephesians, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

That's the very first command that he gives in Ephesians chapter 4 after the great therefore, in the light of expounding all the wonders of the gospel, all the things that God's grace has done for these Gentile Ephesians.

Very striking, isn't it? The very opposite of the condemnatory grumbling that James is speaking about here. It's what he's spoken about very firmly already, hasn't it?

We've seen it in chapter 4 verses 11 and 12 about speaking evil against one another, about judging one another. And he warned them there, didn't he? Don't forget that one true judge who alone can judge truly and he will judge you, every one of us.

He's at the door. He can see, he can hear everything. So take care, says James, lest you should be judged. That's not an idle threat, is it?

[ 24 : 36 ] He's just repeating the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 7 verse 1. And grumbling in the Bible, you see, is never anything other than quite a serious thing. It was grumbling against Moses that condemned the Israelites.

Exposed their hearts, didn't it, as not being established. Not being ones that showed the fruit of that true and patient, steadfast faith. And not surprisingly, of course, as they're very often something that's manifested against leaders, which makes them groan.

What is the writer to Hebrews saying? Obey, submit to your leaders, he says, for they're keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy, not with groaning, with grumbling.

It's very true to life, isn't it? It's just so down to earth. When churches face trials of many times, well, who is it that faces the brunt of it? Well, of course, very often it's leaders, isn't it?

And they take the flak not just from outside, but often from inside. And often that's a much harder flak to deal with. Tough decisions often have to be made, don't they, in tough times in the church and some people grumble.

[ 25 : 51 ] That seems to be what was happening here. Very probably some of them didn't agree with the way things were being handled. And so there were fights and quarrels, James says. Well, that's what starts, isn't it, with grumbling because bitterness spreads and then it multiplies.

Well, be careful, says James. Watch your tongues. It's very easy to sound pious, isn't it? Well, I just don't think that was handled very well. That's what you say because, of course, you know better, don't you?

You know all the facts. Especially if you're a senior person, a senior man with experience. Very easy to think that. It's very easy to say that.

It's very easy to keep saying that to your own little circle. And you get a circle that's united by grumbling. All about concern for righteousness, of course, you tell yourself.

But be careful, says James. Don't do that lest you be judged. You, Christian brother, are in danger of deceiving yourself badly, he's saying.

[ 26 : 58 ] But the judge sees it all. He hears it all. He's standing at the door. His ears are open. His eyes are open. And he is coming to bring his reward. But also, don't forget his retribution.

Remember what James says in chapter 3, a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace, those who do peace, not those who spread poison.

So be warned, he's saying, true faith, patient faith, is patient in suffering and it manifests that patience in purity of speech, not with poisonous speech.

Alan Matias says, when our tongues disrupt the fellowship, they rob us of the harvest. Of course, it's true that the judge will bring every aspect of our lives and service under review, but one aspect that led James to recall the imminent judge and the inescapable judgment was the tongue which brings division in fellowships.

so we need to be very careful, don't we, says James? Because the truth is, when we vent our spleen about others, because we feel the pressures of life, perhaps, or whatever it is, we're facing disappointment in life, we're facing pain in life, but when we do that against others, our tongues are just revealing the truth about our hearts and what they reveal is that our hearts are bitter with resentment, not just towards others, but actually, behind it all, towards God himself.

[ 28 : 43 ] We never admit that, of course, of course not, but that's the truth. And that's not the witness, is it, of the established heart. It's bittering the opposite.

It's bittering worrying features, in fact, of the fattened heart, the worldly heart, we read of last week in verse 5, the divided heart that James is always talking about, which he says, in fact, is false to the truth.

Brothers, don't go that way, he's saying. Be patient in your suffering and therefore, pure in your speech. Watch your hearts and watch your tongues.

Instead, be steadfast in walking in the way of blessing. blessing. That's his message. If you look at verses 11 and 12 now, you'll see that the first half of verse 11 really encapsulates the main point of these two verses with the two examples and the steadfastness and the patience around suffering and in speech.

Those two examples, of course, are the prophets and Job. And it's language here, isn't it, that James surely recalls from the Beatitudes. In fact, remember the climactic words of Christ in Beatitudes in Matthew 5, verse 11, blessed are you when others revile and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[ 30 : 11 ] Rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven and so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. so Jesus calls such ones blessed amid their suffering.

And so do we, says James. We do, don't we? We laud those like that as heroes of the faith and we want to share that kind of wonderful blessing that God confers on them, just preferably not quite that way.

I mean, I'd much rather have that blessing by knowing that all men speak well of me and don't slander me. Wouldn't you? But alas, Jesus reminds us, doesn't he, that that's not the way of his blessing but likely the way of his curse.

Woe to you. Woe to you when all men speak well of you for so their fathers did to the false prophets. Oh dear. Perhaps we'd better listen to James then as he gives us these examples of true faith to aspire to.

Two encouraging examples of how to be patient in suffering and pure in speech. And the first is verse 10. Look, the prophets. The prophets who kept on speaking truth from God to men despite suffering great persecution and especially at the hands of the professing people of God.

[ 31 : 36 ] You'll need to read the first few verses of Hebrews chapter 11 or any verses in there to see the frequent experience, in fact, the typical experience of the prophets who God sent to speak his word to the people.

Hebrews 11 verse 35, some were tortured, others endured mocking and flogging, leaving chains, imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword, they went about in skins of sheep and goat, destitute, afflicted, mistreated, of whom the world was not worthy.

All of that not for their wrongdoing but because of their faithfulness to God and his word which was unwanted and which was very often rejected by God's own people, by his church.

Read Jeremiah chapter 11 later on, you'll see it tells about how he was hounded by those of his very own town to stop him speaking the truth. Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hand.

That's what they said to him. It's a censorship and cancellation for wrong speech. It isn't new. Keir Starmer didn't invent it although he loves it. But censorship and cancellation of those who speak the truth is always a very ominous thing.

[ 32 : 57 ] Whether it's book burning by the Nazis or the communists or whether it's internet censorship by those who say they're combating disinformation or pretending that they're protecting children.

And it's especially concerning when it's targeted at those who speak the truth of God in a hostile world. But what James is saying is it is intrinsic.

It is an integral part of being a true witness to God. Remember Jesus' parable of the vineyard in Luke chapter 20. Every single servant that God sent was abused by his tenants.

And when he sent his own beloved son what happened? They killed him. They murdered him. We consider them blessed says James.

Yes, says Jesus. We honor the tombs of the prophets once they're long dead but while they were alive while they were actually speaking God's truth in patient steadfast faith you scorned them you abused them you hated them.



[ 34 : 02 ] That's just the truth friends. We honor men like William Wilberforce don't we? We hold him up as a great evangelical hero. In his lifetime it was not so. Many, many Christians scorned what he was doing and said this is no place for Christians to be involved in politics.

I think of when I was growing up Mary Whitehouse many of you will remember who campaigned against pornography in television and in the media and violence and so on and the effects it would have on children she was met with universal vitriolic scorn.

And yet today even many liberals I have even read an article in The Guardian saying that we should have listened more to Mary Whitehouse and the reason that we see what we see today among so many young people would not be quite what it was if we had listened.

We love the tombs of the prophets but not the words of the prophets. So being patient until the coming of the Lord means to follow in the train of those true prophets.

To go on speaking the truth from God to man especially when we have to suffer for it. And to suffer from it even when that opposition comes from within the professing church the very ones that we are faithfully witnessing God's truth too.

[ 35 : 33 ] So you can see James' call to patience isn't a call to passivity is it? It's not a call to quietism. Nor is it a call to violence and those sorts of things.

Verses 1-6 he's like an Old Testament prophet isn't he? He's calling out the evil. He's denouncing the injustice just as the prophets did even to rulers even to kings they were not silent.

But he's not promoting revolution. But he's not either is he just talking about pietism and quietism and escapism. He's acknowledging that steadfast witness to the truth of God means calling evil evil.

Calling people to repent. Calling people to truly obey the truth of God and the true king of this world. And recognizing that when we do that it will bring opposition and it will bring suffering.

And if we know what is right and don't do it he's already told us that is sin. So we must be steadfast in speaking and in doing what is right.

[ 36 : 53 ] It is the way the master went should not the servant tread it still says the hymn. And he's telling us that you're not unique. He's saying it's always been like that. Remember the prophets the ones that we call blessed the ones that God himself calls blessed.

And as Peter reminds us in his letter in 1 Peter 5 we're not unique. The same kind of suffering is being experienced by our brothers and sisters all over the world.

And that's still true today. That's something that I will be hearing I'm sure a great deal about this coming week where I'm going later today. That is true faith. That is living faith says James.

James uses these examples says one scholar to show us three elements that make up the portrait of patience at work in the believer's life. Suffering perseverance and blessing.

Suffering enters the believer's life. Patience is the believer's response. And blessing comes from the Lord who is full of compassion and mercy.

[ 38 : 03 ] But blessing is not only enduring suffering which is a virtue in itself because it's an integral part of steadfast faith. Remember the word witness.

Our word witness comes from the Greek word martyreo. It's where we get our word martyr. That tells us that opposition is integral to all true witness. That's why Jesus says woe to you if all men speak well of you.

Because that's not the mark of winsome witness. That's the mark of false witness. But there's more to blessing than just that you see because steadfastness amid suffering produces fruit.

Remember chapter 1 verse 4 it's what does it work in us to produce complete and perfected faith. Suffering has a purpose. It has a goal in the grace and mercy of God.

That's what's emphasized here in James. The second example the example of Job who kept on speaking truth to God and about God despite suffering great pain especially the pain he suffered at the hands of his believing friends.

[ 39 : 09 ] You may think Job is an odd example of right speaking because Job certainly let rip didn't he with complaints to God. He remonstrated with God. And we might think oh that wasn't right.

That's not God's verdict. Yes Job poured out his misery. He poured out his frustrations even his anger. But he did it in faith to God.

His faith questioned. It complained. It argued with God but it was never ever extinguished was it? His wife urged him remember at the beginning curse God and die but he wouldn't do it and never did it.

He endured with steadfast faith and the misery that he endured from his so-called Christian comforters was the worst misery of all. The greatest pain. All their pious platitudes all their theological axioms.

But there was a total absence wasn't there of the mercy the compassion of God. But God's verdict on Job if you read it in chapter 42 God says they have not spoken what is right like my servant Job has.

[ 40 : 18 ] And we read that God blessed Job's latter days more than his beginning. and his story is recorded in scripture for us so that as James says we can see the purpose of God how he is compassionate and merciful.

God was perfecting Job's faith as Job let steadfastness have its full effect in him as he humbled himself under God's mighty hand.

And Job learned the purpose of God not just from his suffering itself certainly not from his pious friends who were totally wrong about everything but from God's words to him so that he could at last say to the Lord that he had come to far greater far deeper knowledge of God not just through his suffering but through his steadfast faith in it and therefore God perfecting his faith and showing him his words of great compassion and mercy.

That's a word to us isn't it? Reminding us that God has a purpose always in what he is working out through our patient steadfast trust in him our obedience to him through every danger toil and slayer as John Newton said he's teaching us that it was grace that brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home and God's word tells us that again and again and again read 1 Peter chapter 1 these sore trials now he says are so that our faith will result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ read Romans chapter 8 it's in all these things these sufferings these painful trials it's in these things and through them that we will prove more than conquerors through him who loved us Job understood that you see from God's word and in the terrible anguish of his suffering he was able to say he knows the way that I take and when he has tried me

I shall come forth as gold and we know that too friends and we have much much much more revelation of God than even Job had we have much more knowledge of how compassionate how merciful God is that word compassionate there it means abundantly overflowing with tender heartedness the greatest blessing at the end of Job's life wasn't that God gave him more prosperity in earthly terms than he ever had before his truest blessing was that he had far greater knowledge of his God of his abundant loving kindness in his heart now now my eyes have seen you said Job what he have heard of God he now had seen and known so deeply in his experience in a new way that he knew things that he could never have known without that steadfastness and suffering and haven't we in these last days haven't we seen the true glory of our

[ 43 : 42 ] God his overflowing tender heartedness and mercy towards us towards frail and feeble sinners in his purpose for us in his wonderful purpose of overflowing mercy through the very sufferings of his own son the Lord Jesus Christ Hebrews chapter 2 tells us that he was made perfect through suffering in order to be the pioneer of our salvation in order to bring us to glory with him so that we can share that glory of his through suffering and Paul says to the Philippian church we've been granted therefore not only to believe in him but to share in suffering for his sake because it's God's wonderful purpose to make every one of us his children like him to share his glory forever behold we consider blessed those who remain steadfast perhaps even more wonderful to think of those words as the testimony of our Lord

Jesus to his father about us we consider them blessed who remain steadfast what an encouragement to remain steadfast to remain patient in our suffering to remain steadfastly pure in our speech like the prophets who kept speaking the truth to God's people and had great persecution and to keep speaking true words to God in prayer and about God despite great pain even when and perhaps especially when that persecution comes from God's people from those closest to us this farm it's hard to think of more painful things isn't it than to experience those things from brothers and sisters in Christ but those things are sadly all too common aren't they Job's not unique in that experience but no even then above all says James in verse 12 keep on watching your heart and watching your tongue keep patiently speaking only truth to God and to other people whatever your trials whatever your sufferings bring don't let your words lead you to wander away from faith to deceive yourself with a faith that actually is just dead and useless and therefore only open to condemnation that seems to be what James means here in verse 12 by echoing

Jesus words about swearing oaths just enjoining plain honest speech straightforward words in all things nothing to do with forbidding! oaths in a court of law or anything like that that's not what he's got in mind at all he's just talking I think about the temptation to manipulate God to do what we want him to do to change our circumstances to make them go away Lord if you'll take away this thorn in my flesh I swear I'll do this for you or I'll do that for you I promise that's a very tempting thing to have on our lips isn't it but that's not humbling yourself is it under God's almighty hand for him to exalt you his way and in his time that's not letting steadfastness do its work to complete and perfect our faith that's just using the language of faith but making it bogus dead and Jesus whole letter is about exactly that isn't it warning against faith that isn't real that's useless religion faith that doesn't work and friends faith that doesn't work amid real trials and suffering doesn't work it leads only to condemnation that's what he's saying if you don't bridle your tongue so you don't try and manipulate

God and use God to get what you want your way your time to get out of having to endure suffering but remember James says so chillingly in chapter 1 verse 26 then your religion is worthless you're deceiving yourself above all he says now don't do that don't deceive your heart no strengthen establish your heart watch your heart and watch your tongue don't let suffering and trial attempt you to abandon true faith for you know like Job knows that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect so that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing remember that first prescription here's the repeat keep taking it for the rest of your life and remember he knows he knows the way that we take and when he has tested us we will come forth as gold keep looking forward with patience suffering is real we can't pretend it away we don't pretend it away that's no help at all is it utterly foolish to think otherwise we weep with those who weep we mourn with those who mourn we stand with those who suffer suffering is real but

God is faithful abundantly overflowing with tender hearted compassion and mercy and he says blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised promised to all who love him so be patient therefore brothers and sisters until the coming of the Lord says James amen let's pray Lord so often you allow our patience to be tested and so often we're tempted to resent it to grumble against you and then to let it spill out and manifest in grumbling and causing strife with others forgive us

[ 50 : 20 ] Lord and turn our eyes afresh to you to rejoice that you are the Lord who is coming you're the one who's standing at the door so help us we pray to humble ourselves before your mighty hand knowing you've promised so much to everyone who loves you and trusts you until the end help us we pray for Jesus sake Amen Amen Amen Thank you.